

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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FM AMEMBASSY BLANTYRE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8424

INFO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BLANTYRE 1509

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, SREF, PINT, PINS, MI, ZA, MZ

SUBJ: SITUATION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN MALAWI

1. I HAVE NOW HAD CONFIDENTIAL CONVERSATIONS WITH FIVE DIFFERENT AMERICANS INVOLVED IN MISSIONARY WORK AND NONE HAD RECEIVED FROM MALAWI CONTACTS, AT LEAST UNTIL NOW, REPORTS OR RUMORS OF THE ATROCITIES ALLEGED IN THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PUBLICATION, "AWAKE" OF DEC 8, 1975. TWO OF THE MISSIONARIES CONTRASTED THIS WITH THE SITUATION IN 1972 WHEN NUMEROUS REPORTS OF HOUSE BURNINGS, BEATINGS AND OTHER PERSECUTIONS CAME TO THEIR EARS. (PERHAPS IT SHOULD BE NOTED RE THIS POINT THAT THE INTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION WITHIN THE COUNTRY IS ALSO MUCH MORE SENSITIVE AND MORE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED NOW THAN IT WAS IN 1972.) I HAVE ALSO DISCUSSED THE ALLEGATIONS WITH FELLOW AMBASSADORS AND THE BRITISH HICOM. NONE HAD ANY INFORMATION WHICH WOULD CONFIRM THEM. THE BRITISH HICOM ALSO MADE THE POINT THAT THE DEARTH OF SUCH REPORTS AND RUMORS FROM MALAWI CONTACTS IS QUITE DIFFERNET FROM WHAT OCCURRED IN 1972.

2. IN RESPONSE TO INFORMAL REQUEST ON MY PART, I WAS ABLE TO TALK TODAY PRIVATELY WITH THE EXPATRIATE WHO IS THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE MALAWI SUPREME COURT. BEFORE RECEIVING ME HE CLEARED THE VISIT WITH THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE WHO
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AUTHORIZED IT PROVIDED THE CHIEF JUSTICE WOULD NOT BE QUOTED

OR REFERRED TO IN ANY WAY BY US. IN SUMMARY, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OUTLINED THE MALAWIAN LEGAL POSITION WITH REGARD TO THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND CITED VARIOUS CASES AND DECISIONS WHICH WOULD SUPPORT HIS POSITION THAT MEMBERS OF THIS SECT ARE PROPERLY TREATED UNDER MALAWIAN LAW. WITH REGARD TO ALLEGATIONS OF "EXTRA-JUDICIAL ACTIVITIES", HE SAID HE HAD NO INFORMATION NOR COULD OFFER ANY COMMENT. HE SAID THE LAW DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY PROVIDE FOR THE CONFISCATION OF THE PROPERTY OF CONVICTED JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND HE WAS NOT AWARE THAT SUCH CONFISCATION IS TAKING PLACE. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT BY SEPARATE ACTION UNDER THE FORFEITURE ACT, PROPERTY COULD BE SO CONFISCATED.

3. DESPITE THE ABOVE REPORT, I BELIEVE THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ARE BEING HARSHLY TREATED, JUDGED BY OUR STANDARDS AND BELIEFS. WE HAVE RECEIVED VARIOUS REPORTS OF THE ARREST OF THE ABLE-BODIED MEN AND WOMEN OF THIS SECT WHO ARE BEING HELD IN VARIOUS PRISONS AWAITING TRIAL. WE HAVE ONE REPORT, YET TO BE CONFIRMED, THAT THE DOWA PRISON HAS BEEN REOPENED FOR THE PURPOSE OF RECEIVING CONVICTED JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES. TWO OF THE ABOVE MISSIONARIES WERE OF THE PERSONAL BELIEF THAT MANY ATROCITIES AGAINST THESE PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN PLACE. WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE BRITISH HICOM, WHICH HAS CONTACTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, MAY DEVELOP MORE INFORMATION ON THIS SUBJECT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

4. THIS EMBASSY HAS NOW RECEIVED 46 LETTERS FROM THE UNITED STATES REQUESTING THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TAKE ACTION IN THIS MATTER. IT IS MY THOUGHT THAT WE SHOULD DRAFT ONE LETTER OF REPLY TO ALL THESE LETTERS AND WE ARE PREPARED TO DO SO. HOWEVER, IT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL IF WE MIGHT FIRST RECEIVE THE TEXT OF REPLIES WHICH HAVE BEEN SENT OUT BY THE DEPT IN ANSWER TO SIMILAR QUERIES. STATE TEL 286244 INDICATED COPIES OF THESE REPLIES WERE BEING POUCHED. AS YET THEY HAVE NOT BEEN RECEIVED. WOULD APPRECIATE ANY COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE. STEVENSON

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